

THE UNSEAWORTHY SHIPS COMMISSION.

(From the Times.)
The preliminary Report of the Unseaworthy Ships Commission has been supplemented by the publication of the Minutes of Evidence, and the Appendix—A Blue-book, of between 500 and 600 pages. The Commission have put nearly 1,200 questions to the witnesses who have appeared before them, and we shall now turn over the leaves of this mass of evidence, extracting such portions as will serve to show the foundations of the statements, arguments, and conclusions contained in the report, a condensed summary of which has already (September 30) appeared in our columns.

Since overloading is the branch of their inquiry to which the attention of the Commissioners is first directed in the Royal Commission, and since it has, therefore, precedence in the report, we will begin by seeing what the witnesses have to say on this head, both as to the prevalence of the abuse and as to remedies which would put a stop to it. Mr. Russell, secretary to the Liverpool Underwriters' Association, considers that "overloading in Liverpool is scarcely known at present," yet he admits that "it sometimes occurs that a vessel reported as having been laden deeply comes to some mishap very soon." Captain Sandeman, Liverpool surveyor for the London Salvage Association, speaking of foreign-going vessels, "cannot say, as a rule, that the ships at Liverpool overload; there have been exceptional cases, which cases have been very bad, but, as a rule, I have no impression that the Liverpool ships load very fairly." Liverpool coasters, he considers, "do load very deep." "As a rule, very little attention is paid to coasters; deep-loading in their case seems to be recognized." The shipping agents, as expected, are as cautious as coasters, says the same witness, "never approach the scale which guides the surveyor in judging of a vessel's fitness in going to sea." Mr. Lampert, speaking from a forty years' knowledge of Liverpool shipping, fortified by the opinion of the Liverpool Underwriters' Association, considered that a still longer period could call to mind "no single instance to which he had suspected that any vessel which had left the port of Liverpool had been lost because of being overloaded." So much for Liverpool. Let us now take Cardiff, a port which Mr. Pimlin considered to have had no instance of overloading. Mr. Neate, Board of Trade surveyor at Cardiff, knew of but "two or three cases of dangerous overloading during the last two years." Mr. Samuel Robins, a shipping agent at the same port, did not think that a great deal of overloading was going on at Cardiff. At present Mr. Batchelor, member of the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce, had "recently heard of several cases of overloading," while Mr. Wilson, also of the Cardiff Chamber of Commerce, considered overloading at his port "quite the exception," but Mr. Miller thought Cardiff ships were "largely overladen." As to the east coast, Mr. Hall, of Newcastle, did not think there was "more overloading in the Tyne than in any other ports." Mr. Bullock, a Tyne harbour-master, has observed many vessels "excessively overladen," while Lieutenant Reed and Mr. Charles Quinton, both of Newcastle, considered that there was a great deal of overloading among Tyne shipping. Mr. M'iver, of the Cunard Company, spoke to having noticed at Malta "a large number of British steamers going homeward grossly overloaded." The evidence of some of the witnesses is more valuable than that of others, but, on the whole, it is made clear that overloading exists to an extent serious in itself, though the cases may appear but few and trifling when compared with the sailings of vessels which are not overloaded. The Commission, who all through their evidence are as cautious as though they were stepping blindfold among red hot ploughshares, notice the contradictory evidence without committing themselves to any expression of opinion; but since they pass on to consider the measures which have been suggested to them for the prevention of overloading, we must suppose that they allow that it exists.

"That every ship should be marked with a load-line beyond which its owner should not be allowed to immerse it would appear at first sight to be a very obvious means of putting a stop to overloading. This remedy, however, is not very easy of application. Mr. Harper, one of the witnesses of the Salvage Association, gave evidence showing that his Association was in the habit, for the protection of shipowners, of drawing the attention of shipowners to any "very clear cases" in which their ships were overloaded. But in the formal letter from the Association to the shipowner merely draws the attention of the latter to the fact that the clear side of his vessel, at 3 inches to the foot depth of hold, would be as many more feet and inches than its clear side as actually laden. This notice, the sending of which is "a very rare occurrence indeed," is only given in the case of vessels which are "grossly overloaded." It does not appear that the scale of 3 inches freeboard to the foot depth of hold is required by the Salvage Association; it is merely mentioned as a usual standard, any considerable departure from which would require to be justified by explanations, giving particulars as to the build and shape of the vessel, and in regard to this 3-inch scale, Mr. Harper, in another part of his evidence, observes that "the officers of the committee have it in their mind as a guide, and they then exercise their judgment, which is a trained judgment, upon the particular case, and say, we believe, upon the whole, that this ship is overloaded." It is admitted on all hands that some ships may load with safety beyond the 3-inch scale, and Mr. Russell speaks of a similar scale used by the Liverpool surveyors as an elastic scale, in all cases subject to the judgment of the individual surveyor who applies it. "I find many 'experienced witnesses' entering a strong protest against a hard and fast load-line. Mr. Russell considered that a law which laid down the 3-inch scale would operate 'very unfairly,' would be a premium on the building of vessels with a very large bottom and very small upper works, and would also act injuriously as a sort of Government reward to the owners of weak and inferior ships, permitting them to load their vessels down to a depth which could not be exceeded by hulls of the very strongest build. Mr. Russell considered that a uniform load-line would be an idea so absurd as not to admit of serious discussion. Mr. Rankin, of Liverpool, thought a load-line "would give a license for overloading," while Mr. Gray, Marine Secretary to the Board of Trade, was prepared to make rather a bold statement to the Commission—namely, that in the event of any hard and fast load-line being established it would be a direct means of endangering life and property. Mr. Gray then proceeds to show how a load-line, calculated on Mr. Pimlin's scale, would set "one of those weak awning-decked ships, that have been giving the Committee of Lloyd's Registry and the Committee of the Admiralty trouble lately," no higher out of the water than "strong, honest, seaworthy, three-decked ship." There would thus be a Government premium on the building of a light and weak spar-decked ship of the same size as our strong and heavy three-deck ships. Some witnesses are of opinion that a "medium" load-line "might be a thing on a vessel,—that is, a line beyond which could never safely or legally be loaded, even in the fairest weather, or for the shortest voyage; but others make it clear that there would be a tendency always to load up to such a mark, even when it was understood that the maximum line would add no danger more to the peril of the sea. As to going to the other extreme, and marking a vessel's side with a minimum load-line, safe for any voyage, or cargo, or season, Mr. Rankin, when asked "what would be the effect of that?" replied,—"The effect would be that the British shipowner would be a thing of the past, there is no doubt of it; he would have to abandon trade altogether. Of course, he would not abandon it, but he would get a foreign register, which can be done, as I understand, with perfect ease, and not at great cost." Though every British industry that Parliament has ever touched

has cried strenuously for pity on the plea that the new law would ruin it, and though all such industries, as it turned out, have prospered remarkably well ever after, there is no doubt that a "minimum load-line" would take so much cargo out of our ships that it would be well worth the owner's while to sail under a foreign flag. In their preliminary report, the Commissioners only go so far as to say that they cannot recommend the adoption of a fixed load-line, which should calculate the freeboard in proportion to the depth of hold of a vessel; but it is evident that the notion of a maximum or minimum line to be marked by Government agents is just as impracticable. Mr. Barnaby, chief naval architect at the Admiralty, suggests in his evidence that the builder of every ship should be compelled to mark upon its side what he considers to be a proper load-line; but it is not easy to see the use of this. If the line is to be a fair and proper line, Government must take care that the builder marks it properly, and this would be equivalent to Government marking the line itself. Mr. Barnaby does not suggest that vessels should be prevented from loading above this line, but he would have it marked as an indication, which might be evidence in case of a mishap, of the state in which the vessel was leaving harbour. It seems to us that a shipowner would consider himself justified in sinking his vessel to this "builder's line," which might be an extreme one, under all circumstances, and that, in fact, it is open to the same objections—whatever their strength—which attach to any fixed mark. As long as the same ship sails in summer and winter, on short voyages and long, with cargoes which must vary, according to their specific gravity, both in the amount which may be safely stowed and in the mode in which it ought to be stowed, a load-line marked upon the side cannot be a safe guide, and it is the same thing to prevent overloading and allow the full freight necessary in trade. As Mr. Harper, one of the most capable of the witnesses examined by the Commission, urges—

"What I mean as to a load-line is that you cannot fix a right line to be applied to a vessel, and then mark it as a guide to the owner, and expect any one ship under all circumstances, and therefore you have to rely upon an expert. And this expert exercises his judgment, probably with a rule—a sort of standard—in his mind, and so is able to give a fairly reliable opinion that, upon the whole, such and such a ship is too deep. I think that he would never be able to say that she is two inches too deep, or three inches too deep, but would be able to give a reliable opinion that the ship is, on the whole, dangerously deep. You cannot make it much more precise than that. Then if I am correct in saying that for the question of a load-line you are always thrown back upon your expert, you will see how difficult it would be to enforce a general rule. If you take a particular ship, and if your expert tells you that ship is too deep by several inches, or a foot, or two feet, or three feet, I differ from you entirely. And if the question should come into a Court of Law, for every expert produced to say that that ship was overloaded, the shipowner would produce an expert to say that she was not. And the question being always disputable, the difficulty of enforcing a load-line by official interference seems to me insurmountable."

The Act, however, of last Session does give the Board of Trade power to stop any vessel from proceeding to sea which they have "reason to believe" is unseaworthy, from overloading or any other cause. The Board of Trade officers are thus constituted experts in the matter of judging whether a vessel is overloaded or not; yet we have no reason to suppose that the Board of Trade will fall into all the difficulties and litigation which Mr. Harper apprehends, for though, at a certain point, it becomes a nice and disputable question whether a vessel is overloaded, and such a ship is too deep, the Board of Trade will probably be so very clear that there can be no two opinions about it.

The owners of coasters are energetic in denouncing any attempt to interfere with the carrying power of their vessels by enacting a load-line law. Mr. Worlock, a Knottley shipowner, whose vessels average about 160 tons, will not sell or allow to be chartered if he is to be bound by a load-line. "I have no doubt," he says, "we should have very little to deliver when we got to the far end." If his ships were compelled to observe a scale of even 2 inches freeboard to the foot depth of hold, it would, he considers, lessen their earnings by as much as 10 per cent. "If you stop our ships, we shall have to go to the Union." I have no doubt that it would stop, in round numbers, two-thirds of the small coasting traders at once. By "it," Mr. Neate apparently means any measure which should compel these vessels to put to sea with a smaller cargo, or with less equipment, and with no more than a fair sea-breeze. These coasters, Mr. Neate asserts, are navigated by men who take the risks with their eyes open, who are perfectly acquainted with the powers of their vessels, and keep very close to land. There is no doubt that many coasting vessels do load very deeply, and, as we have there any doubt that the livelihood of the owner depends upon the deep loading and economical sailing of the small craft in which they are not afraid to trust their own lives. There remains to be eluded the loss of life due to this excess of loading, and the remedy is a matter of management. Upon this point we find no information in the preliminary report, and until we have such information it is impossible to form an opinion as to the propriety of legislative interference with a class of vessels in which, to repeat the words of the Liverpool Surveyor of the London Salvage Association, "the great danger is to be recognized." So long as the crews of these small coasters sail their vessels safely, let them not be interfered with; but if they sail them with loss of life due to overloading or other causes clearly preventable, their trade must be interfered with. Though the Royal Commissioners have not yet informed the public upon this point and though—contrary to what was expected, and, indeed, hoped—they have not yet recommended any legislation, we must remember that they have been outstripped and anticipated by the Board of Trade, which has proceeded during the last Session in an Act of which it is not too much to say that it places the whole shipping of the country, so far as seaworthiness is concerned, in official hands. Any British vessel, from an Australian liner to a Margate hoy, can be prevented by the Board of Trade from putting to sea in an unsafe condition, and there can be no question that with the power to do this is joined also the responsibility of seeing that it is done.

Mr. Russell, of Liverpool, who so strongly condemns the notion of a uniform load-line, offered the Commissioners a suggestion of his own. He would have a Government brand put upon every ship, which should mark off exactly one-fourth of its whole interior capacity, this being the proportion which any competent judges consider should be left above the water when a vessel is loaded. Mr. Russell did not propose that this mark should be a legal load-line, but that it should be a mark and nothing more, and that it should be the public generally to form an opinion as to the load. This suggestion, as the Commissioners say, is a "Report venture, though delicately and with the greatest diffidence, to hint, is manifestly futile. If Government are to mark vessels, the mark must mean something, and it would be the height of absurdity to allow vessels to go to sea sunk two or three feet above a Government brand, supposed to indicate a line of safety. Even taken in conjunction with the present power of the Board of Trade to detain a vessel, such a mark would be of no use, for, as Mr. Russell in his evidence

allows, the seaworthiness of a vessel with more than three-fourths of her internal capacity under water is still "a matter of opinion." Shipowners would also fall into the habit of considering all loading safe that was on the right side of the Government line. Now this line would leave 25 per cent. spare buoyancy above water, and Mr. Russell himself testifies that "30 per cent. is the usual margin for fair loading, according to the estimate of men of experience." He goes on to say, that "if the mark be put at 25 per cent., it is reasonable to suppose that mark would usually be above water and would always be in sight," and then he adds, "if it were supposed that because a good vessel might be loaded to that depth, it therefore ought to be loaded to the same depth,—i.e., to the mark made by Government at the same spot on vessels of all ages and classes,—it would be dangerous. If Mr. Russell's object be merely, as would appear, to have some mark above water which might be a guide to surveyors in judging whether a vessel were overloaded, then the mark had much better be a scale of figures measuring the internal capacity of the vessel, and the same manner as its draught is measured by the scale of figures at stem and stern. This would prevent the very small allowance of 25 per cent. of buoyancy being taken by the shipowner for the line to which he was warranted in loading his vessel under all circumstances. We have, however, this seriously discussed Mr. Russell's proposal only because the Royal Commissioners, though in their preliminary report they have ventured to hint at one or two strong objections to it, have yet trodden round it very delicately indeed, and reserved it for "further consideration." We do not ourselves think that either to any other end, or to any other end, it is suggested for marking the depth to which vessels may be safely loaded at all meet the real difficulties of the case.

QUANTITY AND QUALITY IN EDUCATION.

(From the Saturday Review.)
In the conflict with popular ignorance, the one thing needful is to bring the friends of education. With this ultimate victory would be certain, though a great deal of hard fighting might still be required to secure it. Doubtful, this, even the issue of the struggle is doubtful—doubtful, that is, in the sense of its being uncertain whether universal education will come in time to prevent the occurrence of a worsting which it is the only adequate safeguard. The charge which we have most often brought against the Education League is that they have adopted a policy which creates division where union is so much wanted. On all sides the question how every child in the country is to be educated, and how the State is to be put in danger of being forgotten. The Denominationalists are in arms for the maintenance of State-aid to voluntary schools. The Secularists are in arms for the withdrawal of State aid from voluntary schools, and the creation everywhere of School Boards and School Boards. 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MERCANTILE AND MONEY ARTICLE.			
SATURDAY EVENING.			
THE Customs duties received to-day were as follows:—			
Spirits	...	£231	1
Tobacco (cut)	...	224	3
A. A. porter, and beer (in wood)	...	5	0
Cigars	...	2	0
Wine	...	45	10
Coffee and chicory	...	38	0
Sugar (refined)	...	2	0
Do. (unrefined)	...	208	0
Opium	...	214	10
Rice...	...	41	10
Nuts	...	6	10
Mail	...	6	10
Specific duty	...	108	0
Duties on warehouse duty	...	11	10
Harbour and light dues	...	11	10
Total	...	£1017	13
<p>Mr. G. N. Griffiths reports the sale of a portion of the "Natal Downs" station, on account of Messrs. Bundock and Hays, with 1000 head of sheep, at 3s.; horses, &c., £675; total amount of sale, £5535.</p> <p>On Monday (this day), Messrs. Stubb's and Co. will sell by auction the cargo of sugar ex Arrowby, and Messrs. Richardson and Wrench will hold a sale of tin ore.</p>			

Mauritius advises to November 12 state that a crop will not be finished so early as last year, and will probably amount to 130,000 tons. The firm sales are 53 dollars to 6 dollars 30 cents. Fine white yellow crystals were 15 cents per 100 lbs. Current quotations were:—Fine to finest white crystals, 25 to 7.50 dollars; good to fine white, 6.80 to 2.25 dollars; good to fine white counters, 6.60 to 7.25 dollars; fine yellow crystals, 6.50 to 6.85 dollars; strong yellowish crystals (brewers'), 4.90 to 7.15 dollars; fine yellow counter, 6.25 to 6.85 dollars; good ditto, 6 to 6.25 dollars; inferior to low yellow syrups, 5 to 5.75 dollars. Of the import market, Messrs. Scott and Co. report:—

Wholesale: Imported during the month 37 bags of Dutch sulphur, from the same source as before. Prices are nominally higher than last year, but have been reduced by 10% since we imported during the month one cargo of 800 bags from the same source. The quality of the sulphur has been sold at 5.50 dollars per 100 lbs. The price of the quality of the sulphur has been held up by imports at 5.50 dollars per 100 lbs. The price of the quality of the sulphur has been held up by imports at 5.50 dollars per 100 lbs. The price of the quality of the sulphur has been held up by imports at 5.50 dollars per 100 lbs.

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at a preliminary meeting of the Broadwater and other Queensland insurance companies, held at the offices of Messrs. Spence and Bayly, directors, Exchange, pursuant to notice, a committee was appointed to consider and report to a general meeting, to be held at the same place on the 12th inst., as to the best course to be pursued in defending actions for calls, &c.

Engel & G. M. Co. The following telegram from the London office of Messrs. Engel & G. M. Co. has just been received:—Crushed 120 tons from new crop; yield 75 per cent. premium; the buying price on London being 1 1/2 per cent. premium; the buying price on the spot 1 1/2 per cent. discount.

MINING G.

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A NOVEL RAPE.—The *Ballarat Courier* states that on Monday morning the 45th year of age late of Melbourne witnessed the unusual sight of a horse har-

Soon after the locomotive in the fall car, over O. Stone, discovered the quadruped in full career, and endeavored to outstrip the train. To put on extra speed he pulled the whistle, and the train, in consequence of the conveyance to destruction over the embankment, and to allow the horse to cross the line would perhaps have been averted. The train, however, was not stopped, and he secured the beast by keeping the train in motion at the train's own pace, a hoarse gallop, until reaching the fall car, when he pulled the whistle, and the train, in consequence of the alarm to the stationmaster, the gate was shut, the train brought to a standstill, and the horse captured. The stationmaster, Mr. W. A. Walker, hatter, of Burlington, was a passenger by the train, and, enjoying the race until he discovered the quadruped, he pulled the whistle. It was very fortunate that no accident resulted from the train's stopping, as the rear wheels of the vehicle were within a foot or two of the edge of the track, and the train, in consequence of the stop, the off-ends of the trap being in the track, would have run on, and so kept from going off the track. Mr. Walker, however, was not satisfied with the result, and, as he had a ticket, had foregone the train, and in rushing to the station, where it might be found and taken back to his establishment, the accident, and, by some means or other, the quadruped was secured. The cause of the accident of the approaching engine caused it to bolt.

DISPOSAL OF WILDERNESS.—Such was his industry, that he mastered every subject of conversation, and, in consequence of his acquaintance with the people, he could talk with as much as the most agreeable informant.

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